

# Operation open space

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Departement Omgeving  
Vereniging van de Vlaamse Provincies  
Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten

Architecture Workroom Brussels  
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**For the past three years, the Open Space Platform — an initiative of the Vlaamse Landmaatschappij, Departement Omgeving, Vlaamse Vereniging van Steden en Gemeenten and Vlaamse Vereniging van Provincies — has united the expertise and creativity of diverse actors and sectors in Flanders around a common interest, a shared asset: the open space.**

**Open space and urbanisation are both fundamental components of one large, cohesive ecosystem. They are interdependent; one cannot exist without the other. The knowledge acquired in the learning trajectory and the test trajectory therefore enables us to bundle, connect and reinforce the different policy visions for the open space. In this publication we plead the case for an innovative, integrated programme approach that could accelerate the implementation of the diverse policy objectives, along with ongoing initiatives.**

**The insights from the Open Space Platform have been collected in this publication by Architecture Workroom and the KU Leuven research group PLEN, which jointly steered the Open Space Platform.**

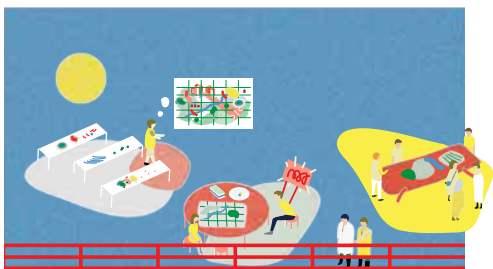
**Operation Open Space shifts up a gear in 2018. The first programme for climate-robust, agro-water management has been launched and will translate shared knowledge into specific action on the ground. This publication also explores other programmes. In a next phase, we broaden the gained insights and further develop — in close collaboration with stakeholders — these next steps.**

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I.

**Open  
space  
is  
vital**

# The open space provides essential services

The open space is vital. It is of time immemorial, a source of welfare and well-being. Open space will also be essential in the future, to preserve and boost our welfare.

Being part of the Eurodelta, comprising the Maas, Scheldt and Rhine, Flanders is one of the most fertile regions in the world. The finely-branched river landscape connects a diverse agricultural area with important natural biotopes. The diversity of these landscapes is crucial for offering nature enough opportunities and maintaining a resilient ecosystem.

Open space is not only necessary for safeguarding food supplies and biodiversity. It also provides our urbanised society with countless essential services. Open space mitigates the effects of climate change, it provides buffer capacity for water shortages or excesses, and provides the space we will need to generate renewable energy. Open space also grants us moments of tranquillity, peace and experiences that are crucial as a counterweight to hectic, urban life.

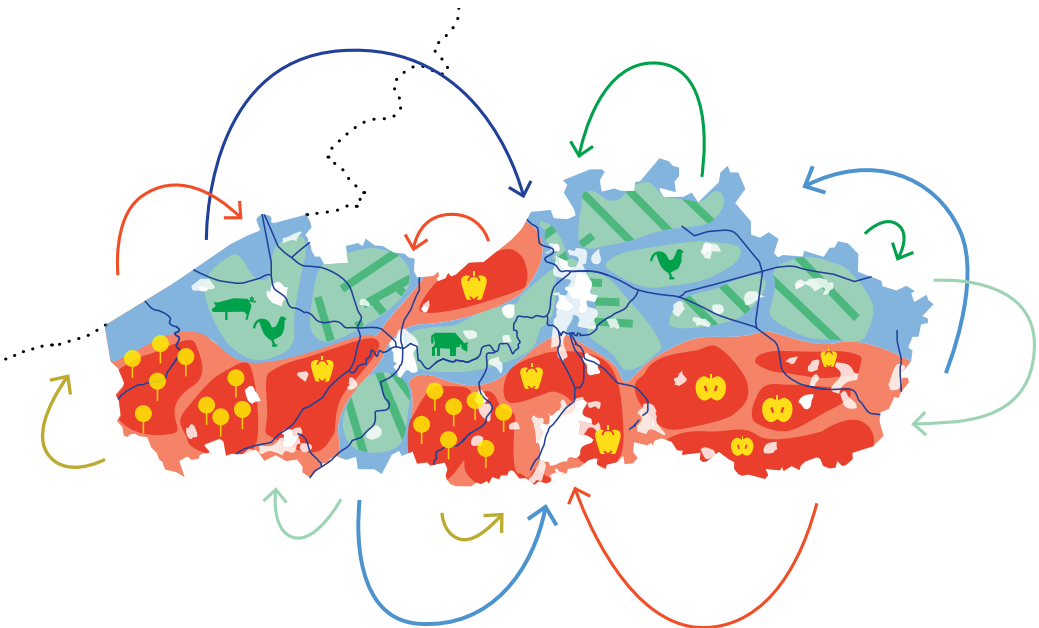
The open space is a *common*.



# The open space is going on the offensive

Pressure on open space is increasing. We are developing ever more open space for additional urbanisation, for living and working, for recreation and infrastructure. Open space is becoming scarce. This brings new challenges with it. In densely built-up areas we face the challenge of retaining enough open space and even reintroducing it. In places where open space still prevails, the challenge is to better align the landscape and urbanisation and find a robust balance between water, agriculture and nature.

We need to ensure that open space is no longer threatened by persistent urbanisation, but that it gives direction to the environment. Open space — the place for food production, nature, water, energy generation and recreation — is decisive for urbanisation and urban organisation. The open space is going on the offensive.

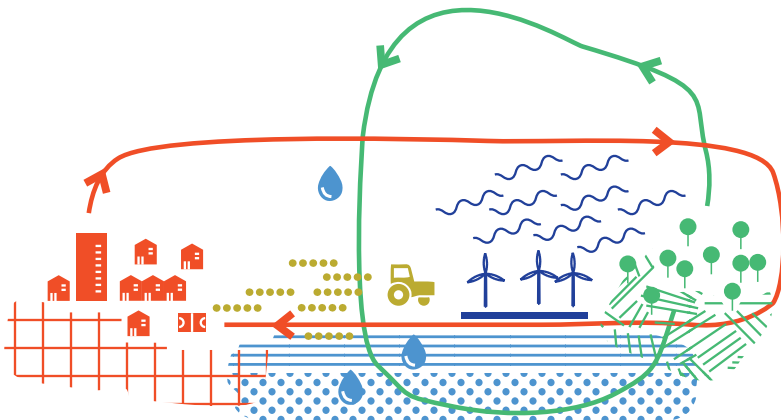


# City and landscape are interdependent

The open space system also has its own, internal logic, just like an urban system. The open space forms a complex physical system with a specific soil condition, special (natural or cultivated) vegetation and own water balance (with interaction between surface and underground watercourses). All functions have their place.

Open space is not redeemable or tradable. The open space can only supply its services provided there is knowledge and recognition of the conditions, functions and uniqueness of the place or area concerned. The right scale is also important: a complex ecosystem can only survive if it is part of a larger, connected and cohesive whole.

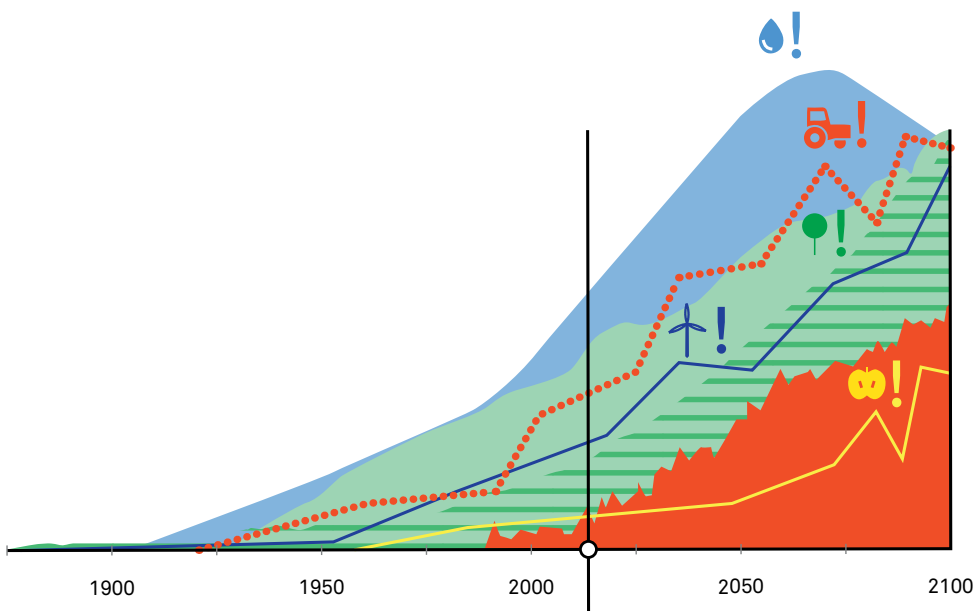
The challenge involves reconciling both logics, that of the open space system and that of the urban system. Open space and urbanisation are both fundamental components of one large, cohesive *ecosystem*. They are interdependent; one cannot exist without the other.



# Open space is the key

Today, we face countless complex challenges related to climate, biodiversity, water management, food supplies, energy and so on. Remarkably, the open space is an indispensable key to devising solutions for each of these challenges. Open space is, more than ever, a lever for a prosperous and sustainable future. This is a collective responsibility.

Some of these challenges are global, others more regional or local, while others play out on several scale levels simultaneously. Due to its intrinsic and unique qualities, open space in Flanders could contribute to a great many challenges that go far beyond its own territory. In other words, open space in Flanders is a locally as well as globally shared asset.





## II.

**A multitude  
of actors,  
projects  
and  
initiatives**

# Everyone is a co-owner of the open space

Authorities on different levels recognise the value of the open space for our urbanised society. This is expressed in decisive policy. This policy is often organised in a sectoral manner, mainly by the environment or agriculture domains. The choice is increasingly for a cross-sector and *integrated approach*.

Concern for the open space is also growing from the bottom up. Nowadays citizens actively contribute to improving the open space. Social solidarity with the open space transcends property boundaries and public and private boundaries. This new dynamic offers hope. There exists a sense of co-ownership, which ensures that the *quality* of the open space increasingly takes priority.

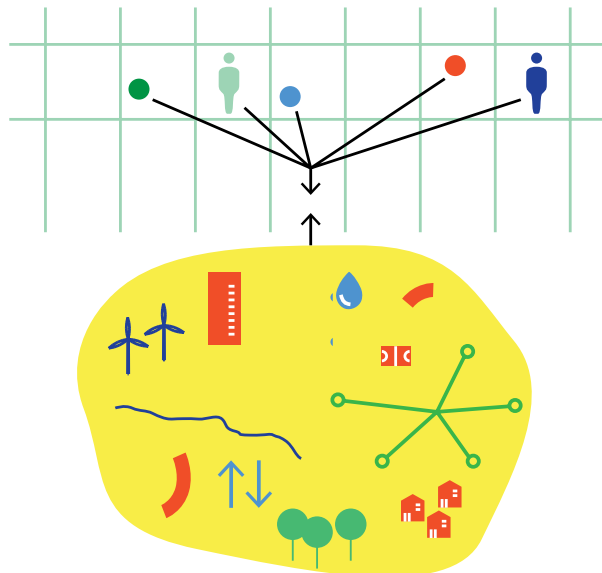
Facing this new dynamic is the prevailing view that it is up to the authorities to bear the burden for designing and managing the open space. Given the specific and diverse services the open space provides and the increasing (global) pressure on the open space, it is preferable that the costs are not unilaterally borne by a separate 'open space budget'. Other policy domains – as well as other social actors, including citizens, civil society and businesses – are gradually realising that they also receive services from the open space. They are also prepared to put their weight behind the collective challenges.

# Integrated approach

Opening up, in the first instance, a sectoral issue, such as creating additional woodland or agricultural area, to a more complex issue (climate change, food production, health, well-being) or an area-specific issue, automatically involves the step towards more integrated action.

Various (global) challenges come together and interact in the open space. This means that the design and management of the open space offer opportunities for collectively tackling these issues. Without spatial cohesion the different challenges compete with each other. Moreover, an integrated approach helps develop a local network and gain trust and support.

Ministers with transition-based or territorial competences could and should also examine this complexity.



# History of the Open Space Platform

(2013)

## The Open Space Offensive

On the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, the Vlaamse Landmaatschappij (VLM), along with the AWB ‘think-and-do tank’, and the architects firm Bovenbouw set up a design research project. In 2013, the future study for open space in Flanders led to the publication of *The Open Space Offensive*. The publication formulates six urgent future projects (or *families of challenges*) for the open space in Flanders. Each of the challenges inverts the usual logic: the open space is no longer that which is left behind after urbanisation has taken place; open space is, conversely, the place for food production, energy generation, recreation and nature, decisive for urban development.

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(2014)

## Foundation of the Open Space Platform

Following the publication of *The Open Space Offensive*, the Flemish Land Agency approached the Departement Omgeving of the Flemish Government, the Vlaamse Vereniging van Steden en Gemeenten (VMSG) and the Vereniging van Vlaamse Provincies (VVP). In 2014, the four parties co-founded the *Open Space Platform*. The Platform’s operations were organised according to three parallel tracks:

1. *A learning trajectory*  
Bringing together ongoing projects, initiatives and knowledge;
2. *A test trajectory*  
Initiating and supporting design research in six innovative demonstration projects;
3. *A policy trajectory*  
Formulating proposals for more effective policy.

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(2017)

## Operation Open Space

The insights acquired in the learning and test trajectories are reflected in this publication. *Operation Open Space* searches for a way in which the different families of challenges can find their way to operationalisation at the level of Flanders. *Operation Open Space* pleads the case for an *active and integrated programme approach* that forges coalitions between Flemish, municipal and provincial authorities, civil society organisations, civic initiatives and private actors in the open space.

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(2018 - 2020)

### **Launch of the 'Water-Land-Scape' programme**

In 2017, the partners of the Open Space Platform and the Flemish Minister for Environment, Nature and Agriculture, Joke Schauvliege, launched a call for the *Water-Land-Scape* programme, which is part of the *Smarter Agro* challenge. The programme strives to identify the urgent needs related to water management in agricultural areas and find appropriate solutions that provide a win-win for sustainable food production, landscape quality and a robust water system, in association with local farmers, landowners, local authorities and water managers. The selection of area-specific projects is planned for the spring of 2018. The programme aims for effective implementation on the ground and will run until 2020.

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(2018 - ...)

### **The Open Space Movement**

From 2018, the *Open Space Platform* will shift up a gear with the foundation of the *Open Space Movement*. The Open Space Movement is not a traditional movement in the sense of an interest group. On the contrary, it strives for a widely known and socially supported project for the open space in Flanders. It concludes new partnerships and devises new methods to link the challenges and the objectives related to the open space to an *action perspective*, to action and a dynamic in the field. The Open Space Movement is not an initiative that replaces existing organisations, but one that complements them. It develops specific implementation strategies based on the insights and with the energy supplied by the many initiatives already underway. You could say the Open Space Movement stands on the shoulders of existing projects and focuses on actively bundling, boosting and exchanging knowledge.

Six families of challenges from the Open Space Offensive



**Development of city outskirts**  
How could a city and agriculture be mutually reinforcing and supportive in the many, small, still remaining pieces of fertile farmland in the outskirts of our cities?



**Food landscape**  
Short-chain farming is becoming increasingly important. How could we integrate food production and distribution in spatial terms in the city?



**Landscape development**  
The open space is under increasing pressure from urbanisation. How could the eradication of residential expansion areas on flood plains and the densification of existing population centres result in a qualitative and robust landscape?



**Open-space infrastructure**  
Water scarcity presents a risk to the river landscape in Flanders. How could we transform the 'blue network' once more into the backbone of a regional project for the future?



**Ambitious landscapes**  
How could the many nature reserves and heritage landscapes that are bountiful in Flanders, expand into regional parks of urbanised Flanders?



**Smarter Agro**  
Agriculture is severely affected by the water issue (increased risk of flooding and drought). How could the tension between intensive farming and water consumption be transformed into a collaboration for a new landscape?

# Shared task, collective action

Several policy domains bear active responsibility for designing and managing the open space. In doing so they reach out to local initiatives. Established and new actors work on highly diverse challenges in many places in the Flemish landscape. Various ongoing projects by the Flemish Government, its agencies, the Regional Landscapes and area-specific practice of the provinces and municipalities are successful examples of integrated action in the open space.

All these projects, practices, processes and cooperation partnerships have resulted in a valuable accumulation of knowledge. Today we face the challenge of valorising this knowledge. Bundling expertise and know-how allows us to introduce the renewed approach on a larger scale.





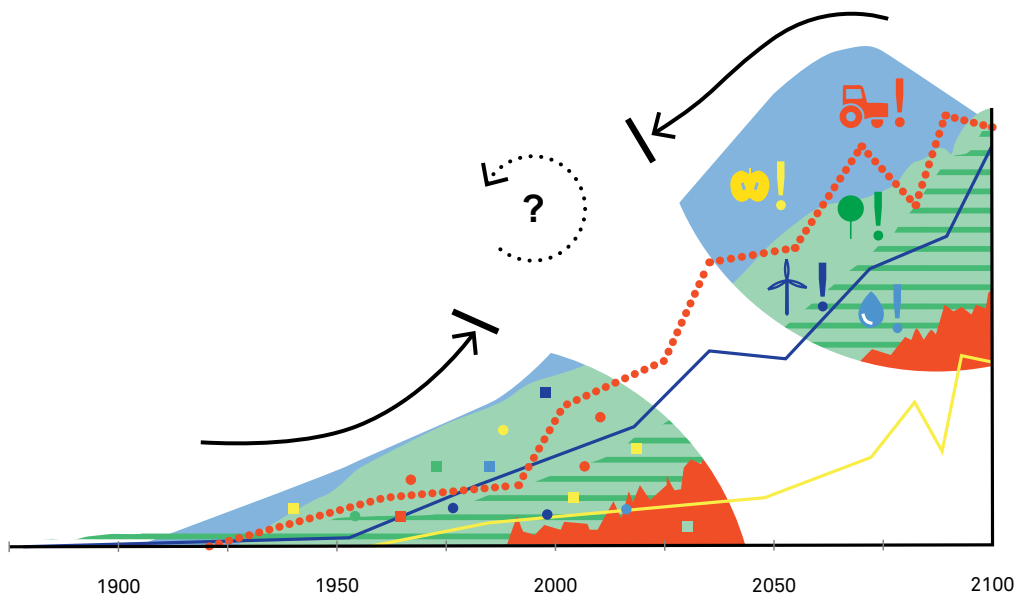
### III.

**Need  
for  
a new  
method**

# Establishing a foothold

Many global challenges, including in the areas of climate, the environment, water management and energy, have been translated into international treaties, agreements and guidelines. There exists global, or almost global, consensus on the targets to be achieved. Flanders has also committed to defending its vulnerable capitals and converts the agreements into specific action. The will regarding the policy is there. The promises have been made.

Yet we do not succeed in reaching these targets. It seems virtually impossible to translate the long-term objectives into a specific and supported plan of action for the open space. The relationship between general objectives and practice is abstract and theoretical, and despite scientific substantiation the choices we have to make are far from neutral. This means that, in contrast to the general objectives, the strategic objectives are not, by definition, broadly supported by society. On the contrary, they still represent too much of a step into the unknown. They create uncertainty. They involve risks.



# Progress with a glass ceiling

We do not succeed in bridging the gap between vision and practice. The Government of Flanders' traditional policy instruments such as top-down formulated (often quantitative and sectoral) objectives or generic funding mechanisms may span the entire territory but do not appear able to initiate real change on the ground.

Strong, area-specific coalitions dedicated to the open space, do often achieve actual and satisfactory results. Proof of this includes integrated design projects, design research projects and area-specific development projects. These projects show the route we need to pursue. They are implementation-oriented, often encompass large, strategic areas and adopt an ultimately complex agenda that integrates a multitude of themes.

Nevertheless, their impact is still often limited to the areas in which they are active. It is difficult to introduce their quality and approach across the Flemish territory as a whole. Lateral knowledge sharing and expertise development between the projects remains limited, which means we cannot fully make use of the potential available, and cannot achieve the desired snowball effect. We do not succeed in reaching critical mass. We collectively collide with a glass ceiling.

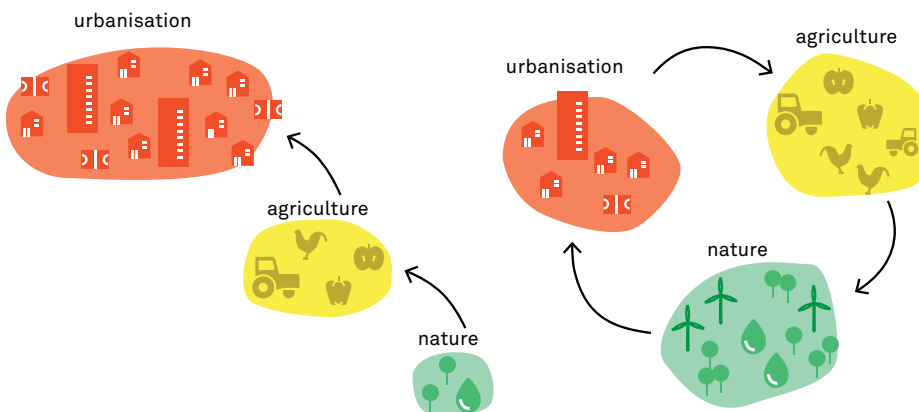
What these good practices for the open space need, is a framework that allows them to fully develop, be duplicated and multiply so that they can be introduced on a larger scale. This is the quest for an *action perspective*.

# Ending the waterfall system

Nature, agriculture, urbanisation and industry are at odds with each other. Nature must often make room for agriculture, just as agriculture must make room for demographic growth, urbanisation and employment. This conflict situation is no longer sustainable.

The challenges facing the open space simultaneously relate to the many policy domains and levels of government and are mutually dependent. Therefore we must redraw the values chain of our spatial organisation. We must transform the cascade of subordinate spatial systems into an integrated or symbiotic ecosystem.

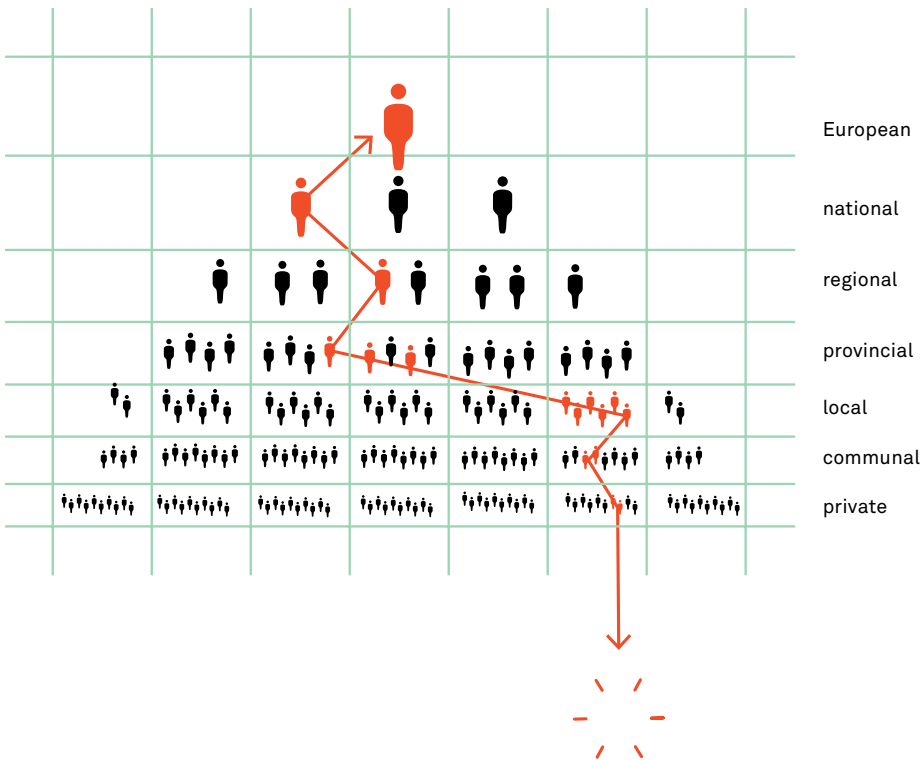
Just as urbanisation needs agriculture for its food supply, it is in agriculture's interest to preserve and even boost the natural ecosystem. Agriculture cannot survive without robust ecosystems. In other words we have to strive for a new, healthy and solid balance between nature, agriculture and urbanisation, in which they are mutually reinforcing instead of competing with each other.



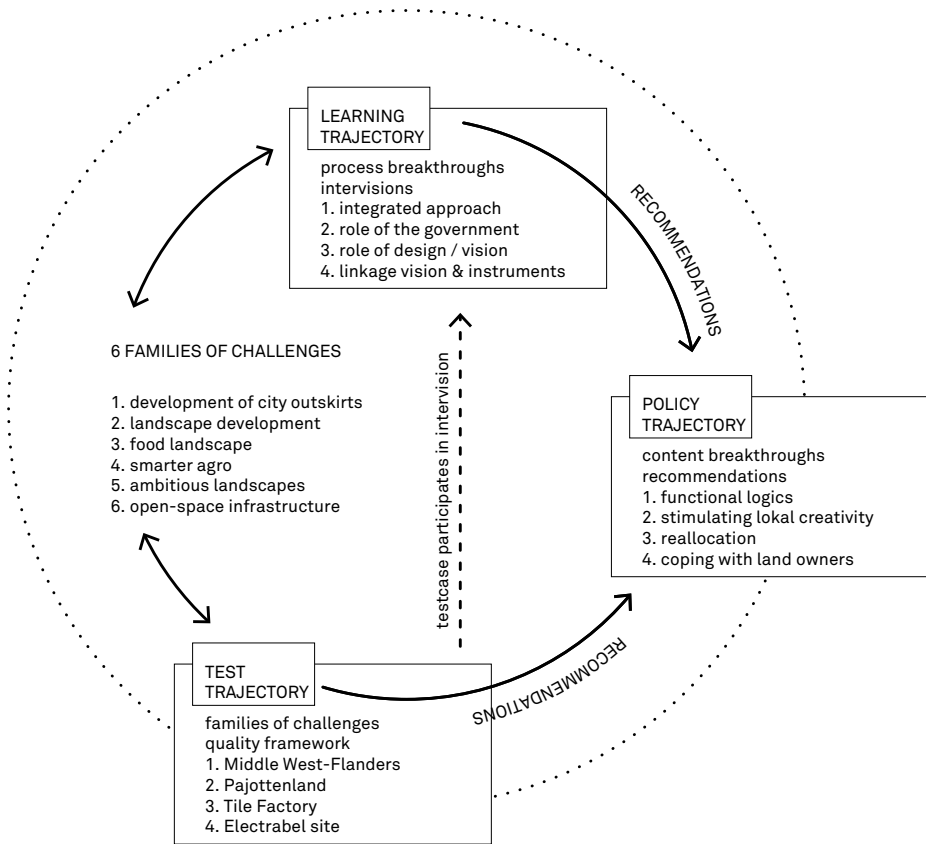


# Multi-level governance

The principle of subsidiarity, which states that competences are neatly distributed between different policy levels and that every authority is solely responsible for its assigned competences, is inadequate for overcoming the complex challenges. Authorities on different government levels will have to cooperate on the open space in a different way. We require structural *multi-level governance*, in which authorities – international, national, regional and local – work on one and the same agenda, creating learning interaction between the different government levels. This could give rise to interaction between a guiding, steering and framework-producing higher authority and the know-how and field knowledge of local authorities.



# Learning and testing within the Open Space Platform



To test the visions for the future formulated in the *Open Space Offensive* in practice, the Open Space Platform brought different partners together around the table. These included people from administrations, civil society, interest organisations and civic initiatives. The Open Space Platform launched a learning and test trajectory with these partners.

## Learning trajectory

During a series of consultations led by KU Leuven-PLEN, the Open Space Platform consulted six ongoing *innovative processes* or practices for the open space. Three open space experts steered the consultations: Geert De Blust (INBO), Elke Vanempten (ILVO and Flemish Government Architect Team) and Sylvie Van Damme (HoGent).

The six open space practices consulted were:

- > The Veldgebied to the south of Bruges;
- > Bossuit-Kortrijk Canal Park;
- > Rural Mobility Westhoek;
- > De Liereman nature reserve in the Province of Antwerp;
- > Maas Valley River Park;
- > The follow-up project De Cirkel land re-parcelling of Jesseren in Limburg.

The joint consultations revealed a great many insights related to the mutual alignment of sometimes irreconcilable logics and interests, to stimulating local creativity, to approaching landowners and re-classification, to the added value of spatial design in the decision-making process and to the route from vision to implementation.

The Open Space Platform also consulted twenty-one *civic initiatives* for the open space. The Platform spoke with initiators about the rationale behind their existence, their internal operations and decision-making process, their future perspectives and expectations regarding the authorities. The discussions revealed that bottom-up initiatives are becoming increasingly important for the implementation of Flemish policy for the open space. Government partners involved in the Platform were impressed by the weight of such initiatives. During the discussions the first steps were taken in a mutual approach and understanding between bottom-up initiatives and government agencies.

### Test trajectory

Besides the learning trajectory, the Open Space Platform set up a test trajectory for four new practices, which was led by AWB. The four cases from the test trajectory are all places or areas characterised by an acute challenge.

Two cases had, in the past, been classified as a ‘hard’ development planning zone, but were also part of a valuable corridor of open space:

- > The former tile factory on the border of Oud-Turnhout, Turnhout and Ravels;
- > The Electrabel site at the Rupel estuary in Schelle.

Two other cases concerned larger regions where the initiators had already taken some steps to place less familiar substantive challenges on the agenda:

- > Regional cross-border short-chain farming in the region of Pajottenland-Brussels;
- > An integrated approach to water scarcity and excess in Central-West Flanders.

The Open Space Platform assessed the test cases in terms of their relevance for the ‘family of challenges’ to which they belong. The question that arose was: how could the test cases provide insights for a strategy that could be rolled out on the scale of Flanders?



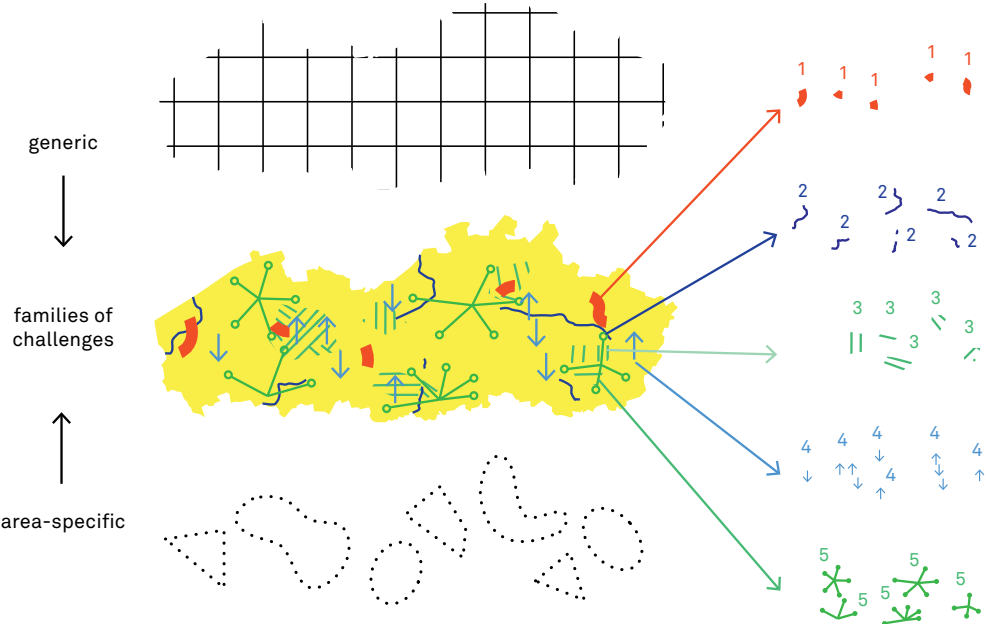
## IV.

# Trans- formative approach

# Recurring challenges

The challenges in the areas of agriculture, water, energy and the environment are profoundly intertwined. If everything is interrelated it can also be organised accordingly. The mutual dependence of challenges and ambitions is not a threat, but an opportunity. If, for example, we approach the water challenge and the transition in agriculture as a common interest, the impact and the lever are greater. An integrated approach can achieve more and achieve faster and more targeted results. Moreover, we eliminate several risks at the same time.

In order to grasp the overwhelming complexity of the challenges, it may be useful to break down the challenges into ‘bite-size’ chunks and achievable sub-projects. Certain challenges crop up multiple times in the territory and can be thematised in *families of challenges*. Identifying *recurring challenges* provides insights that can be shared much faster. We translate abstract challenges and objectives into action on a human scale.

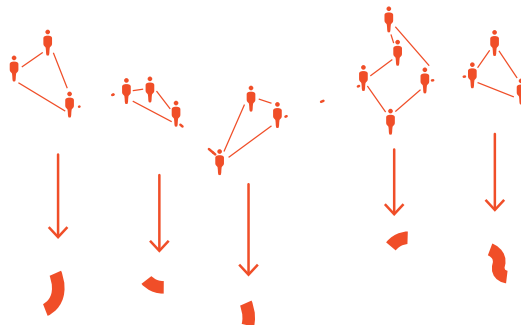


# Active programme approach

This is why we are pleading the case for an *active programme approach* that focuses on the specific needs that exist in each of the challenges facing the open space. In a programme approach the Government of Flanders creates a legal, financial and supporting framework in which local actors and stakeholders can get started. The government translates its vision, policy priorities and objectives into a clear, integrated implementation agenda. With this agenda it invites local authorities and actors to facilitate implementation tailored to the area concerned.

We forge coalitions per family of challenges and bundle cooperation partnerships thematically in various types of programmes. Each programme links existing agenda points and policy visions to a clear working method. This working method could be different each time and depends on specific needs, shortcomings or urgencies.

The programme approach offers a method for tackling urgencies on a large scale – or better still: as a multitude of smaller projects. It does not make traditional processes of regional development or land appliance programmes superfluous. On the contrary, the latter continue to be necessary in order to take care of strategic areas in all their complexity.



# Customisation

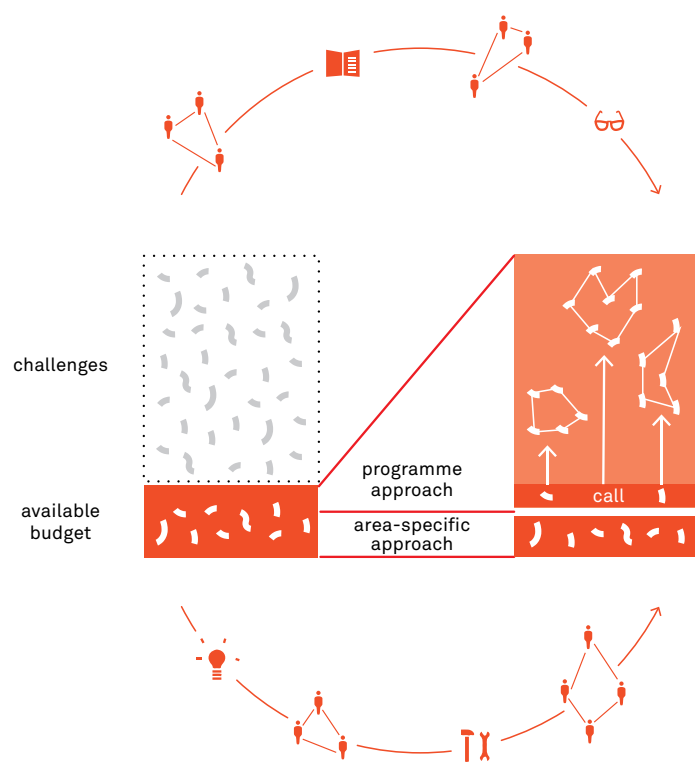
An example. The demand arose among various local alliances for an innovative approach for managing groundwater and surface water in areas where agriculture, urbanisation and industry are closely interwoven. Intensive farming threatens the quality of water and soil and results in falling groundwater levels. Farmers could take on a new task in this regard. For example, they could lay a system of brooks or water buffers that improve the quality of the water, the soil and surrounding biotopes, as well as the quality of the landscape. This means that farmers are no longer merely food producers but also ‘water farmers’ or landscape managers.

We created the *Water-Land-Scape* programme to stimulate this new role for agriculture. The programme requires the Government of Flanders to reorganise and connect to the local level. This challenge involves the greatest need to increase the quality and speed of implementation. Therefore, the programme must call on local alliances and organisations to achieve this approach on the ground, supported by the combined know-how and resources of the programme approach.

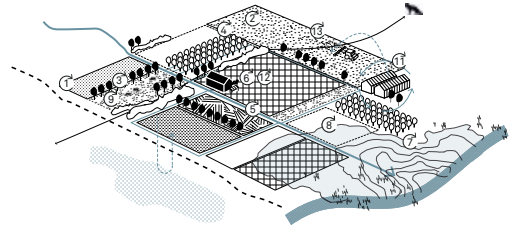
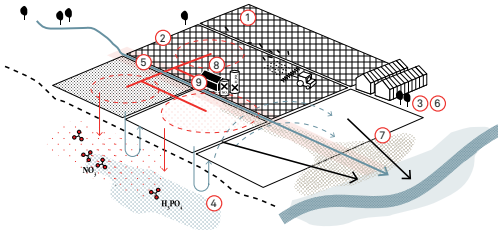
However, it does not always have to follow this procedure. The families of challenges are all different. A theme such as local food production has completely different needs. Nowadays, initiatives related to short-chain farming exist in almost all cities. This predominantly involves a great need for knowledge exchange in the field of, for example, food distribution or closing residual flows of organic waste. This is the focus of the *Food Brain* programme.



We have to create different programmes for each challenge. They depend on the requirements in the field. In some programmes this will concern safeguarding a suitable legal framework, or we may have to develop new funding mechanisms.



# Water-Land-Scape



As a result of climate change we are increasingly confronted with flooding and periods of drought. In the future the water and drought issue will only worsen. It is important that we guard against this, not only to protect our highly urbanised living environment, but also to ensure that we have sufficient qualitative water to produce our food.

The *Water-Land-Scape* programme is a new method for tackling issues related to water in rural and agricultural areas in close cooperation with users such as farmers and businesses, villagers and landscape managers. The programme strives for an integrated, long-term approach to the water challenge. It aspires to more effective agriculture and greater biodiversity by limiting the risk of flooding and drought and by working on the spatial quality of the landscape. Therefore, the measures will have to go further than punctual interventions and must improve the system's resilience against climate change. Measures in the open space as well as in the built-up environment, and measures on private plots as well as in the public domain will be needed.

Local knowledge and local commitment are essential for devising the right measures for a specific area. So it is up to an area's local actors to take the lead and come together. To this end, farmers, owners, local authorities and local water managers sit around the table. To support this cooperation at the Flemish level, the various competent government bodies – the implementing agencies, departments that prepare policy, knowledge institutions – are organised in a *programme team*. While each policy domain has its own objectives that are implemented on the ground (often with conflicts as a result), the programme team examines where an overlap exists in these objectives related to the water issue. This enables the Government of Flanders to speak with one voice and parallel objectives can be translated into area-specific action.

The programme team consists of the Vlaamse Landmaatschappij (VLM), Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij (VMM), Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos (ANB), Departement Landbouw en Visserij, Departement Omgeving, ILVO and VITO.



In the spring of 2017, the *programme team* launched a call for local area coalitions. The proposal is to set up a two-year process in five areas. The objective is to establish a supported and integrated vision and implementation strategy in these areas that could achieve the objectives related to water quantity and soil quality.

The programme supports the collaboration between local actors. It makes funds available to increase our understanding of the water system in an area and establish the right measures through local dialogue. The partners in the programme team combine their knowledge of the area and the water system and make it available to the area coalition. Subsidies are available for specific implementation of the measures. Sometimes it will be necessary to set up a number of experiments in the area. The programme earmarks the necessary resources to achieve this.

To simplify and accelerate the implementation process, the programme team strives for alignment of the available tools and resources at the Flemish level. The programme can be adjusted and scaled up following the initial round involving five local coalitions.

The programme team does not replace existing structures, but complements these with a new layer. Where C-AGNAS and the programming commission Landinrichting mainly work area-specific, the programme team operates from programmes.

# Who takes the initiative?

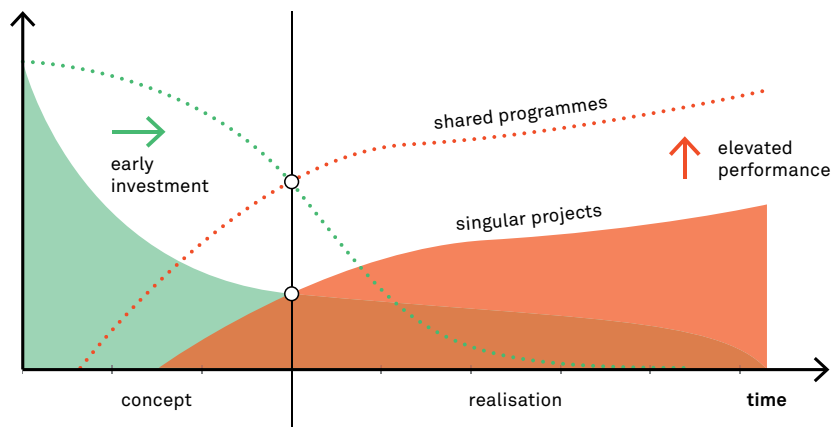
The need or the demand for a programme could emerge from several corners. Sometimes it is a demand from the bottom-up, from a local authority or a local organisation. But it could also be an idea that originates from a minister, the Flemish administration or a theme put forward by civil society.

The Open Space Platform identifies, bundles and explores these themes. Members of the Open Space Platform make recommendations to their own services and map out the ambitions, objectives and challenges that are involved. The Platform brings the necessary partners around the table and compiles a *programme team*. The programme team undertakes action. It drafts, depending on the type of programme, a call to local alliances, bundles and strengthens ongoing projects, or develops a suitable legal framework with the competent authorities. Thanks to the programme team, the Government of Flanders speaks with a single voice and overcomes possible conflicts between the different policy domains. The programme forms the framework for strategic operations on the ground. The operationalisation is organised collectively. The programme team steers the implementation thereof in association with local actors and is responsible for safeguarding quality.

Local alliances are crucial partners. They bundle the necessary local knowledge and experience. They are supported in the quest for a working method by supplying and sharing top-down knowledge and the guarantee of fast action. They are responsible for the specific implementation.

# Investing

The programme approach requires prior investment in time, energy and resources. However, a one-off investment very early on in the start-up phase ensures a faster, more effective and more sustainable performance in the implementation phase. If an investment is made the result simply has to be optimal. The programme team increases the impact and chance of success of collaborations by prioritising quality. It brings knowledge together and thinks ahead to the implementation and preservation of the open space. It commits to use people, resources and tools to translate the common objectives and reuse the knowledge acquired in many other places.



# Ongoing explorations for other programmes

The partners of the Open Space Platform are constantly looking for other integral agendas for an implementation-oriented open space policy. Each family of challenges could give rise to one or more programmes. Apart from the *Water-Land-Scape* programme related to the *Smarter Agro* family of challenges, the Platform formulated programme ideas for three others: the *Food brain* for the *Food landscape* challenge family, the *Places with a difference* programme for the *Ambitious landscapes* challenge family, and the *Open space return* programme for the *Development of city outskirts* challenge family.

## Food brain

Discussions with civic initiatives and government bodies related to the *Food landscape* family of challenges revealed that there are already lots of local, short-chain farming initiatives in Flanders. In almost every city people are looking at how they can improve relationships between urban consumers and food producers in the city outskirts. Critical mass already exists; consequently a programme-based approach for encouraging new initiatives offers little added value or is at least not the most urgent action needed.

However, what is missing is a Food brain – a programme for bundling the knowledge acquired in the various initiatives each time. First and foremost a *learning platform* is required that contains and bundles local knowledge. The learning platform should preferably be initiated by the Government of Flanders. Of this, the *Board of Interest* and the *Contact Point for Local Food Strategies* of the VVSG are already important components. In addition there is a need for structural and reproducible knowledge development across the many initiatives with which such initiatives struggle: economically profitable distribution models that align supply and demand, tools for smoother access to land for producers, and strategies for a circular economy within short-chain farming.

### Places with a difference

The aim of the *Ambitious landscapes* family of challenges is to make open space decisive in the development or redevelopment of 'hard' zoning classifications for strategic places in the open space. It therefore inverts the familiar logic (that considers open space as that which is left behind following urbanisation processes). The practical case of the former tile factory in the Kempen open space serves as inspiration in this respect. For such *Places with a difference* in the open space a decree (similar, for example, to the Brownfield Decree) could form the basis for a programme-based approach. The decree would serve as the legal framework for a call on local area coalitions to examine possible uses for these places using design research. Selected projects receive support from the Flemish Government for vision formation and coalition expansion. This could result in a *green grid covenant* with the aim of simplified implementation and budgetary commitments.

### Open space return

Considerable pressure exists in city outskirts and urbanised centres to develop the remaining fragments of open space. At the same time Flemish spatial policy strives to reduce the space used (the so-called 'concrete halt'). The *Development of the city outskirts* family of challenges aspires to preserve agriculture and nature in these fragments because of their social added value for the urban centres concerned. The *Open space return* programme helps local authorities to, for example, open up for discussion the eradication of residential expansion areas in financial terms, and to create a project with clear social added value.

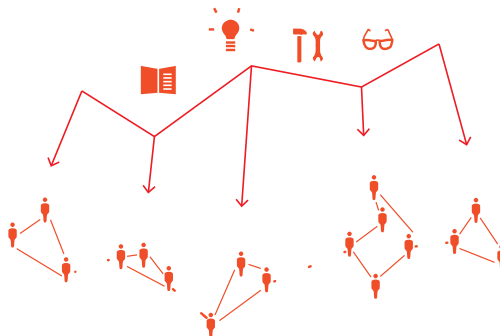
Instead of a general reclassification for a 'mixed open space area' local authorities could apply for support for vision formation and strategy development. Preserving open space goes hand in hand with retaining active farming, developing natural values, using immovable heritage or completing built-up outskirts. Preliminary reflection could result in a contract between the Flemish Government and local authorities, including commitment for a simplified procedure for reclassification.

# Multiplication and acceleration

In a programme the various partners (private individuals, civil society, authorities at different levels, European partners and so on) could organise themselves around a common agenda. There is nothing new in this. We want to share and connect existing qualitative practices and reuse existing policy tools and policy frameworks. This enables us to boost local initiatives and bundle the knowledge acquired so that it can also bear fruit in other places and in other contexts.

There is an *action perspective* tailored to each challenge. A programme brings together a wide range of actors. By sharing and multiplying experience and knowledge, the programme creates leverage and critical mass, and eliminates risks. Expertise is applied to the most urgent problems, at various scale levels and various locations at the same time. The programme team safeguards quality and creates experimental space.

A project thus goes beyond its once-only character. One project is a challenge; lots of similar projects constitute an opportunity. *The next big thing will be a lot of small things.*



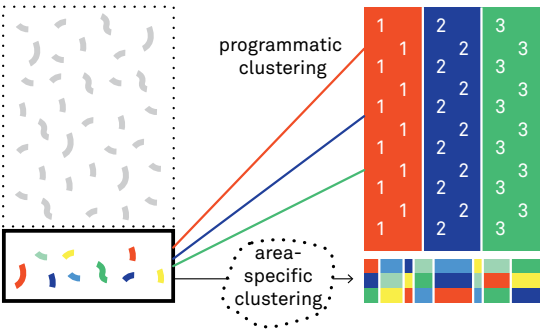


# Operation Open Space

The programme approach provides a method for activating authorities and local knowledge and power and bundling it in an integrated approach. It makes it possible to tackle urgencies on a large scale – or better still, as a multitude of smaller projects.

A programme is a flexible tool. It formulates solutions for urgent needs. It is able to offset changes and jointly evolve alongside needs on the ground. A programme is an iterative process that through *learning by doing* can lead to a systematic approach for recurring challenges in a multitude of places.

Today various programmes are being developed for the open space. They are designed on the basis of existing policy and the bottom-up call, and endorsed by a broad group of people. They form the first, deeply-rooted seeds for Operation Open Space. They provide the necessary impetus for progressing from forming a vision to effective implementation.





**PROMOTORS**

Vlaamse Landmaatschappij (VLM)  
Departement Omgeving  
Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden  
en Gemeenten (VMSG)  
Vereniging van de Vlaamse Provincies (VVP)

**POLICY MAKERS**

Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij (VMM)  
Agentschap voor Natuur en Bos (ANB)  
Waterwegen en Zeekanaal (W&Z)  
Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken (MOW)  
Landbouw en Visserij (L&V)  
ILVO  
VITO

**ESTABLISHED ACTORS**

Boerenbond  
Natuurpunt  
Bond Beter Leefmilieu  
Regionale Landschappen  
Vlaamse Vereniging voor Ruimte & Planning

**NEW INITIATIVES**

Boeren en Buren  
De Landgenoten  
Samenhuizen  
Steunpunt Groene Zorg  
Voedselteams  
Trage Wegen  
Wervel  
Waterconservering Woestwezel  
Bolhuis  
3WatEr  
Rivierpark Maasvallei  
De Cirkel  
Pit – Z33  
De Waterkant  
De Kittelaar  
Parkveldgroep  
Pro Natura  
Werkgroep Bos 't Ename  
Vrienden van de Zwalmse Dorpen  
Werkgroep Stadslandbouw Gent  
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Tuinen van Stene  
Loket Onderhoud Buitengebied  
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**The open space is vital. In the open space numerous challenges simultaneously come to the fore: climate change, water quality, food production, renewable energy, biodiversity and so on.**

**An action perspective is required to confront these complex challenges. This publication pleads the case for an active and integrated programme approach for the open space in Flanders. It enables recurring challenges to be tackled on the scale of the territory as a whole.**

***Operation Open Space* is an intermediate result of the *Open Space Platform*, a joint initiative by the Flemish Land Agency, the Environment, Nature and Energy Department, the Association of Flemish Provinces and the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities.**